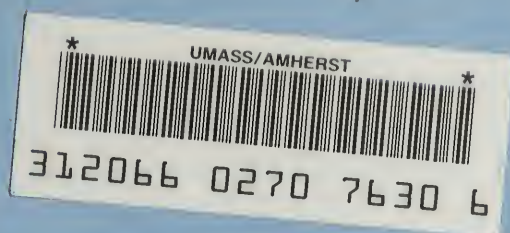


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Circuit Rider Programs

Commonwealth of Massachusetts
Edward J. King, Governor

Executive Office of
Communities and Development
Byron J. Matthews, Secretary

Division of Community Services

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Acknowledgements

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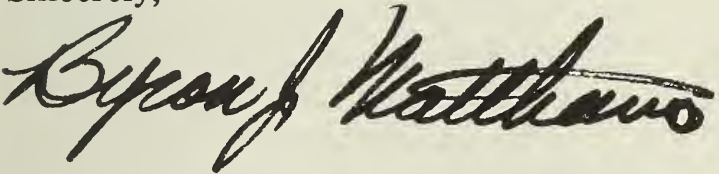
Review: Arthur Kimber, Karen Helmbolt,
Mark Morse, Edward Donnelly,
and Jay Moynihan

To Municipal Officials:

This booklet was prepared to help promote the use of circuit rider programs throughout the Commonwealth. Such programs can provide a means of obtaining much-needed technical expertise especially for our smaller communities. The following pages explain what a circuit rider program is and how to go about setting up such a program with other towns in your area.

I would encourage you to consider this program carefully. The employment of a shared professional person with the appropriate expertise may provide the answer to many of the problems and issues being faced in your community. If the idea of a circuit rider program interests you, I urge you to call us for assistance and further information.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Byron J. Matthews". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, sweeping "B" and a long, horizontal flourish at the end.

Byron J. Matthews
Secretary



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1. What is a circuit rider program?

In response to the increasing administrative and service demands placed on local officials, the concept of shared staff services among several municipalities has gained considerable support and acceptance. Small towns across the nation which cannot afford, or have no need for, a full-time staff person have found sharing staff services to be a valuable addition to their governmental operation. This low-cost program provides similar, adjacent communities with competent professional specialists who have been trained to deal with the problems now facing local governments.

Dividing working hours among several towns, *circuit riders*, as these traveling specialists have come to be known, assist and advise officials on a wide range of issues, including financial administration, personnel management, capital programming, planning, community development, and land-use management. It is important to realize that the role of these persons is restricted to administrative and technical assistance. The authority of local board members to establish and carry out policy is retained. The presence of the circuit rider does not signal an encroachment upon this authority; rather, the ability of the local officials to govern more effectively is enhanced.

The program is not applicable nor intended for every community. It has proven to be most successful, however, in areas where all participants involved are committed to meeting the needs of their towns and improving the effectiveness and efficiency of their local governments.

2. What is an effective geographic or population size for such a program?

Population, number of towns involved, and geographic size are important factors to consider when setting up a circuit rider program in your area. Nationally, there are no established geographic or population standards by which the effectiveness of such a program may be measured. Shared assistants generally serve two to eight communities with populations of less than 12,000, according to data collected at the Circuit Rider Managers' Workshop at Nashville, Tennessee, May 1976.

In Massachusetts, a circuit rider would be most effective if the population of the individual towns ranged from under 1,000 to 10,000. Larger central cities or towns could also participate in a circuit rider program with smaller-satellite towns for a service not likely needed by a small town alone.

Participating communities should be close enough to each other so that traveling time between town halls takes no more than 10 to 20 minutes. A reasonable distance among the communities will foster close working relationships among all parties and will allow the circuit rider to respond quickly on fast-breaking issues in a town.

Communities with Less than 10,000 Population Shaded Areas



3. What kind of services or positions would be involved or considered?

The tasks of a circuit rider can be wide in scope and varied in nature. Assistance can be provided in the following areas:

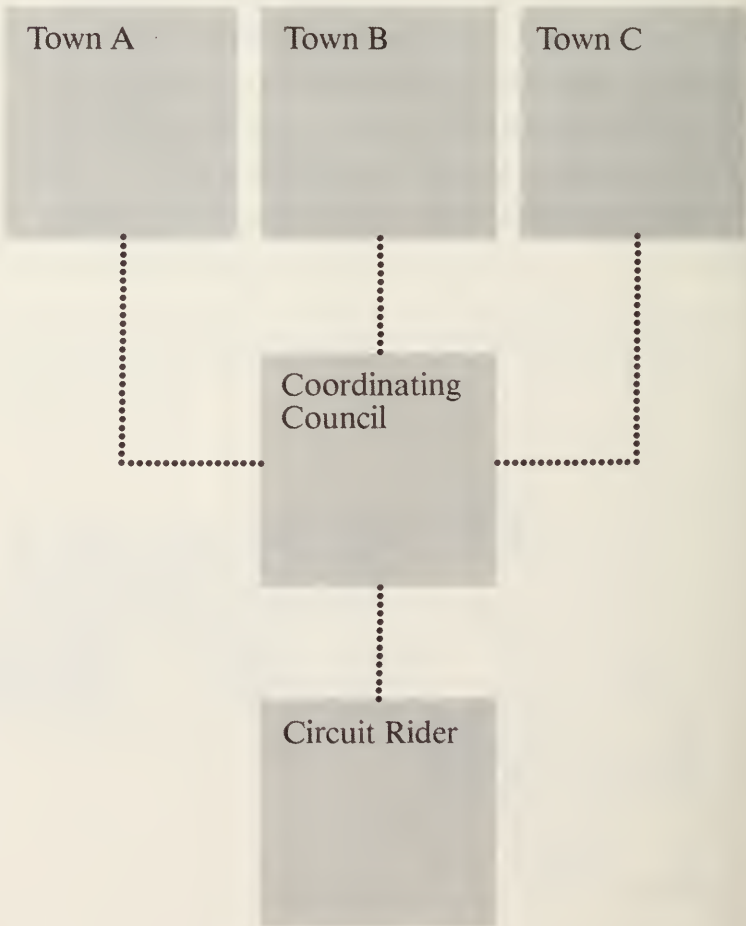
- Accounting
- Building inspection
- Code enforcement
- Conservation planning and enforcement
- Economic development
- Engineering
- Federal and state grant application and administration
- General administration
- Land-use regulation
- Legal counsel
- Personnel management
- Planning
- Public safety
- Purchasing
- Public Works

The duties need not be confined to these areas. A number of communities may join together to employ a person for a particular need such as shellfish warden, harbor patrol, forest manager, recreation director, or virtually any nonelective job that needs to be done.

4. What type of structural organization should be formed?

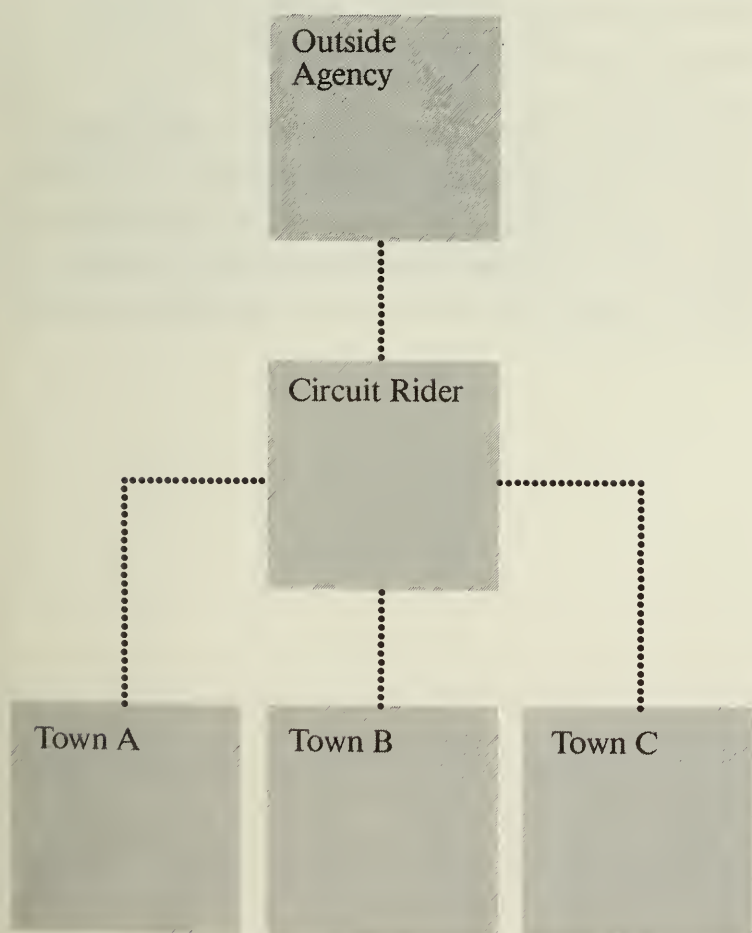
There are many ways in which the structural organization of this service program can be established. The following two models offer the basic options for participating towns. The first form of structural organization involves two or more towns establishing and delegating authority to a coordinating council (consisting of one member from the appropriate board in each community) which employs and supervises the circuit rider. The coordinating council and the towns should agree on how the council will operate (see Question 10). The council should also adopt a formal set of bylaws to govern its operations, based on the agreement.

Local Model



The second model has an outside agency (regional planning, county, or state) providing an individual who would give assistance to two or more towns. In this case, the circuit rider would report directly to the outside agency and would not be an employee of the towns. The towns, once an agreement has been reached with the outside agency on the type of services required, would utilize the circuit rider more or less independently of each other. The circuit rider, under the supervision of the outside agency, would negotiate work tasks with each town separately, much like a private consultant would provide services to a town on a contractual basis.

Outside Agency Model



It is important to determine the most appropriate structure early in the development of the program. Variations on the two models might have the coordinating council and an outside agency sharing supervisory duties and/or funds, representation by someone from an outside agency and/or more than one member from each community to a coordinating council, etc.

The type of structure helps to define the administrative system to be employed. For example, it may be desirable to employ the circuit rider through one of the participating towns for administrative and payroll purposes with the participants sharing the expenses, or paying a fee for service to the host town.

The governmental situation in the participating towns, the type of circuit rider services desired, the amount of time board members would be able to devote to a "coordinating council," and other factors too numerous to mention will determine the structural organization of the program. In all cases, agreements and contracts ought to be prepared by all participants to assure a clear understanding of roles and responsibilities.

5. How is the program financed?

The circuit rider program is not expensive to establish or maintain. Considering the benefits and opportunities it may introduce to your community, the total cost is relatively small. Sound financial planning and management are needed, if the program is to succeed.

Financial or staff resources required to run the program may be obtained from local sources, federal and state grants, and through county and regional planning agencies. Participating towns may divide the cost of local funds by using formulas which would consider differences in affluence, population, and geographic size. The division of cost could identify the communities which would profit most from the service. These towns would then assume a larger percentage of the financing. Or, the towns could simply divide the cost of the program among themselves regardless of their size, affluence, or need.

In any event, it is important to note that local financial commitment is desirable, if not necessary, in order to obtain federal or state assistance in a local circuit rider program.

6. What qualifications should the circuit rider have?

The job of the circuit rider is unlike any other position in public service. The individual must possess a number of basic planning and management skills and a practical knowledge of federal, state, and local government. Since there are few experienced circuit riders in the New England area, candidates for the jobs should have appropriate educational preparation or a record of distinction in previous work. It is not necessary for all shared staff personnel to hold a bachelor's or advanced degree, especially when the duties of the job may not require college training. Outstanding performance in local government could be substituted for some aspects of the traditional educational preparation.

Whatever the candidate's background, you should carefully evaluate the individual's past performance and experience, and link this preparation with the duties to be performed. The most important criterion is a candidate's proven ability to adapt swiftly to local conditions and to produce results.

You should make every possible effort to obtain the most qualified individual. Advertising the job widely should attract promising candidates and assure an excellent applicant pool.

7. What should a job description contain?

When you make the decision to actively recruit a circuit rider, a detailed job description should be prepared. The description should include the following:

Job Title: The job title should reflect the type of services desired.

Duties: The program and tasks of the circuit rider must be described—for example, “make recommendations regarding local government management,” “prepare federal and state grant applications,” etc.

Supervision Received and Supervision

Exercised: This part of the job description should clearly set forth the relationship between the circuit rider and board members and between the circuit rider and any staff in the participating towns.

Special Requirements: This should contain a list of the personal characteristics desired. The individual should, at least, be independent, resourceful, self-starting, and capable of working with a minimum of supervision under conditions not normally found in public service.

Qualifications: Link the job title with necessary qualifications. The amount of education, experience, and skills must be defined.

Salary: The circuit rider’s salary should be determined by the type of job, level of experience, or by the financial ability of the participating towns.

8. What is an appropriate salary?

Circuit riders should be considered as professional specialists in their given field. Since they would likely possess special skills, their salary should reflect the level of skill and the demands of the job.

The salary ultimately depends on the financial ability of the participating towns and/or the individual's experience and preparation. The following list, compiled from the International City Management Association's *Municipal Year Book—1980*, is salaries of public officials in municipalities in the Northeast region of the U.S. in communities with populations ranging from 10,000-25,000.

Job	January 1979 Salary Range
Attorney	11,100-18,700
Auditor	10,800-17,500
Chief Administrative Officer	19,600-28,500
Chief Building Officer	13,700-17,500
Chief Personnel Officer	11,100-16,500
City Engineer	20,300-25,700
Controller	14,300-22,100
Director of Public Works	17,200-23,300
Fire Chief	16,900-23,000
Health Officer	13,000-20,700
Planning Director	15,500-21,400
Police Chief	18,800-25,100
Recreation Director	12,900-18,800

Special financial benefits for a circuit rider should be given in addition to the above salaries to act as compensation for the unique work schedule and travel arrangements necessary for the effectiveness of the program.

9. What support services are needed?

It is necessary to provide some office space for the circuit rider in each of the towns to be served. Because the circuit rider will be spending many hours traveling and assisting various town officials, the work area need not be elaborate. Often a vacant room or a desk in a town hall or office building can be set aside for this purpose.

It is important to provide a central office or “home base” in one of the towns being served by a circuit rider. The home base must contain a telephone, a desk, a typewriter, copying facilities, file cabinets, and supplies (i.e., stationary, paper, stamps, etc.). These necessary items also should be made available in each participating town office.

The circuit rider will need secretarial and clerical assistance; there may be a need to spend additional funds for these services. However, there are several ways local officials may keep the cost of this expense low. High school or college students could arrange to work a few hours per week on a voluntary basis. Existing secretarial staff in one of the participating towns, or secretarial staff from an outside agency if the second model was used (see Question 4), could be employed on a part-time basis. Several secretaries or clerks could, on a rotating basis, provide typing and clerical services to the circuit rider. Also, the CETA program may be used to obtain needed staff support.

10. What should be included in agreements and contracts?

Contracts, agreements, and memoranda of understanding regarding the program must be made among the participating towns; between the circuit rider and the hiring authority; and, if appropriate, between the towns and the outside agency providing the services of the circuit rider.

A typical written agreement among the towns (or between the towns and the outside agency) should, at a minimum, include the following provisions:

- ☐ Location of appropriate office facilities, telephone service, supplies, and clerical support for the circuit rider.
- ☐ A resolution among the participants concerning the duties, responsibilities, and specific time commitments of the circuit rider.
- ☐ A means of providing supervision, guidance, and support where appropriate to assist the circuit rider in carrying out duties.
- ☐ Thorough description of the structural organization, outlining the chain of command and responsibilities of all parties.
- ☐ Procedure for sharing the costs of the program and the circuit rider's salary.
- ☐ Procedure for resolving conflicts which might arise among any of the major parties involved.
- ☐ Clear understanding of any proposed contract between the towns and the circuit rider or outside agency.

A contract between the circuit rider and the hiring authority should contain these features:

- ☐ Procedure describing the development and implementation of a work program.
- ☐ Frequency of board meetings, which the circuit rider will attend, to discuss the progress of projects undertaken.

- ☐ Preparation of regular reports updating work progress, to be distributed to all participants.
- ☐ Recognition of person(s) to whom the circuit rider will be responsible.
- ☐ Provisions for salary and pay schedule.
- ☐ Provisions for fringe benefits (sick leave, personal days, vacation days, compensation, health insurance, etc.).
- ☐ Provisions outlining dismissal procedure (e.g., public hearing).

11. How is a work program developed?

A *work program* is a means of setting forth, in writing, the priorities and specific tasks to be performed by the circuit rider. It provides a basis for recording and measuring the performance of the program.

☐ Guidelines governing the development of a work program should be clearly defined and adhered to. Common goals and projects should be openly discussed.

☐ Local board members and their coordinating council representatives should choose projects of general interest.

☐ The circuit rider should offer advice on the subjects chosen by the participating towns, and propose tasks and schedules to meet their needs.

☐ Local board members, preferably with the assistance of the circuit rider, should prepare a written work program containing the following:

Goals/Objectives: What are the goals/objectives you wish to achieve through this program?

Work Elements: What are the specific tasks necessary to achieve your goals/objectives?

Work Product: What specific products are expected, e.g., reports, grant applications, construction/renovation of buildings?

Anticipated Outcome: What measurable effect will the work have on the future of the communities?

12. How do you set up a circuit rider program?

This booklet has provided a brief introduction to the circuit rider program. It was also designed to act as an agenda for you to follow in establishing such a program. If the idea of a circuit rider program has sparked some interest and you wish to pursue it, several important steps are to be taken:

- ☐ Discuss the program with other members of your board and with board members of adjoining towns with similar needs.
- ☐ Establish support for the implementation of the program in your community by creating interest among residents and other local officials.
- ☐ Prepare the essential agreements, memoranda of understanding, job description, etc.
- ☐ Appropriate sufficient funds for the program.
- ☐ If necessary, obtain outside assistance to help set up a circuit rider program.

Staff of the Division of Community Services of the Executive Office of Communities and Development are available to provide technical assistance on all aspects of establishing a circuit rider program in your community. In addition, we have available a Super 8mm film titled *Local Government Management: Building Professional Capacity* which presents the advantages of professional services, including circuit riders, in Massachusetts. This film can be shown to local officials, interested citizens, and town meetings and can effectively promote

popular support among key groups in your town for the program.

Questions and letters of interest should be addressed to:

Massachusetts Executive Office of
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Division of Community Services
100 Cambridge Street
Boston, Massachusetts 02108
Telephone (617) 727-3197 or
Toll-Free 1-800-392-6445

In Western Massachusetts:

Springfield Office
Massachusetts Executive Office of
Communities and Development
115 State Street
Springfield, Massachusetts 01103
Telephone (413) 736-4581

Notes

Notes

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